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19 February 1968

DCI BRIEFING NOTES

VIETNAM

- I. We can now make an initial assessment of the new situation in South Vietnam since the Tet Offensive, bearing in mind that the situation is still highly fluid, and that some major questions are still unanswered.
  - A. There is the critical situation at Khe Sanh, for example, and the question of whether the pacification and local security forces can move back into the countryside fast enough to fill the vacuum before the Viet Cong are able to consolidate in previously pacified areas.
- II. In the cities, there is little doubt that militarily the Viet Cong failed in terms of what they expected, and took severe losses in doing so.
  - A. Captured documents, prisoner statements, and the movements of major Viet Cong units during the Tet Offensive all support the conclusion that the Communists expected a substantial proportion of the urban population to rally to them after the initial attacks.

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- B. It must have been a sobering experience for them to learn how little real support they had.
  - C. In addition, they lost 30,000 killed and 5,500 captured out of the 60,000 to 80,000 men they committed to the Tet attacks.
    - 1. Key men in both military units and underground networks were killed, and these cadres are going to be hard to replace.
  - D. To keep the enemy's losses in perspective-- The Communists committed less than half of their main forces, and the brunt of the losses was borne by lower level forces and local guerrilla units--some of them fleshed out at the last moment by untrained recruits.
  - E. The fact remains that the second wave of attacks this past week-end was, as predicted, much less intensive and much less widespread.
- III. The present military situation still has some 22,000 North Vietnamese troops threatening Khe Sanh, with another 12,500 along the DMZ or in the northern First Corps area in position to hit other important targets in coordination with the attack on Khe Sanh.
- A. There are elements of three Communist divisions--the 5th, 7th, and 9th--in the

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general area of Saigon.

- B. Other enemy forces threaten Quang Tri on the coast in the north, Dak To in the western highlands, and could move quickly to attack Da Nang or attempt to relieve the Communist remnants holding out in Hue.
- C. All of these forces I have just mentioned are in an offensive posture, and could attack at short notice.

IV. As far as long-term strategy is concerned, the Communists have three options at present:

- A. First, they could decide to escalate the fighting dramatically with an all-out assault on Khe Sanh and other allied positions in the northern provinces and western highlands, possibly moving in additional divisions from North Vietnam to mount the attacks.
- B. Second, they could seek to exploit the psychological effects of the Tet offensive to enter into negotiations, seeking a coalition government which they could soon take over completely.
- C. Third, they could return to protracted indecisive guerrilla warfare, waiting for the continuing cost in lives and materiel to erode the determination of the allies.

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1. The second and third options, of course, are to some extent overlapping.
- D. On balance, the Communist winter-spring campaign as it is developing has a great deal of all three of these approaches in it, and we would not expect Hanoi to consider any major change in strategy before making a serious attempt to create a Dien Bien Phu at Khe Sanh.
- V. The present situation, of course, cannot be viewed entirely in military terms.
  - A. If the enemy took heavy military losses in the Tet Offensive, at the same time he scored psychological gains, and handed the South Vietnamese government some major setbacks.
  - B. The initial Communist attacks caught many of their targets undermanned and ill-prepared, partially because it was Tet.
    1. Vietnamese commanders had been warned for more than three weeks that the enemy was preparing a widespread campaign of attacks, and in a few areas there was even a warning in the last 48 hours that the attack would come during the Tet truce.

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2. To the Vietnamese, however, Tet is New Year, the Fourth of July, Easter and Christmas all at once, and brief leave was granted to a substantial proportion of troops to spend the holiday with their families.
  3. Within a day or two, allied reaction forces and Vietnamese troops recalled from leave had stabilized the situation in all but a few areas.
- C. Psychologically, however, the effect of the first 48 hours was to undercut the growing confidence of urban populations in the ability of the Saigon regime and the allied forces to provide security.
1. This is still one of the imponderables. On the one hand, it is possible that the Tet attacks and further repetitions, even if smaller, will foster a peace-at-any-price sentiment in substantial sectors of public opinion.
  2. On the other hand, the first visible public reaction has been a healthy movement among opposition leaders to develop a united national anti-Communist front.

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- VI. The attacks on the cities generated somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000 refugees--some of them on a temporary basis. They disrupted food supplies and caused prices to skyrocket for several days in shortage areas. They disrupted transport, communications, and industry.
- A. Potentially, the most serious by-product was the exposure of the countryside.
  - B. To meet the first shock of attack, and to deal with such recovery problems as the refugees, regional forces, police forces, and even the Revolutionary Development teams have been drawn from their normal rural stations into the cities.
  - C. This exposes large areas to renewed Viet Cong control, affording them increased access to food, manpower, and their so-called tax revenues.
  - D. The government is aware of the danger and has ordered a priority effort to move these forces back to the countryside, before the Viet Cong can dig in.
- VII. In summary then, militarily the Tet Offensive was a defeat for the Viet Cong; politically, it was a gamble which fell far short of their expectations; psychologically, they made some gains but it is too early to assess the long-term effect; and the outcome for pacification and security has yet to be determined.

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